

Hugh Bowden, "On kissing and making up: court protocol and historiography in Alexander the Great's experiment with proskynesis", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 56, 2013 : 56-77

Abstract

It is widely accepted that Alexander attempted to persuade his Macedonian followers to accept the Persian practice of *proskynesis* (possibly, but not necessarily involving prostration), that this was opposed by members of his court, and that the attempt was given up. This article re-examines the evidence and the assumptions, both ancient and modern, that lie behind the episode as reported. It argues that the words *proskynesis* and *proskynein* had a range of meanings in Greek, but were primarily associated with Greek ideas of Persian behaviour; the gestures covered by the term *proskynesis* were not primarily associated with the gods by Greeks; the depiction of Callisthenes as representing principled opposition to Alexander is fictitious; the objection to the adoption by Alexander of 'barbarian' practices reflects Roman prejudices, rather than any concern of Alexander's contemporaries; the surviving literary sources do not provide reliable evidence for any 'experiment with *proskynesis*' by Alexander.